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THE ORIGINS OF THE RELIGION OF ISRAEL¹.

PRELIMINARY ; THE CRETAN ZEUS ; BABEL AND BIBLE.

WITH the progress of archaeology it becomes every year more clearly manifest that the life and thought of Rome and Greece and Israel took their rise out of a far older world, out of a civilization, a social and mental state, diffused over a wide area, and common to many races—Aryan and Semitic, Egyptian and Chaldean, "Hittite" and "Mycenaean"; and that the characteristics of this state are best understood by comparison with those of peoples still, in more recent times, at a corresponding stage of development.

The common civilization of antiquity was correlated with *a common religion*. Similar elements of thought and worship recur continually in different connexions. The sky and the heavenly bodies are common to all. Pastoral tribes, at the animistic stage, will necessarily reverence a spirit of the herd or of the flock, which will be conceived as male or female according as the tribe itself has reached a system of male kinship or remains in the matriarchal state. Agricultural peoples will seek their prosperity from a spirit of vegetation. The specialized cult of one among the greater gods is a synthesis of many such elements. It may be compared to the basin of a river, in which countless tributary streams combine to swell the

¹ This article forms a continuation of the essay which appeared in *J. Q. R.*, April, 1900; vol. XII, p. 381.

main channel, and we are at a loss when among all these we endeavour to discern the authentic source.

Thus Dr. Frazer has clearly shown that Osiris was alike a spirit of vegetation, a bull-god, and a moon-god¹. All these are elements which enter into the concept of Osiris, and all of them enter, in like manner, into the popular and traditional concept of Jahveh. But this triple coincidence does not presume transmission. These are materials furnished by the common religion of the ancient world to the growth of special cults. And we must not allow such resemblances to blind us to the essential distinction that Osiris is before all things a god of the dead, but Jahveh above all a god of the living.

The religious usages and traditions of ancient Crete present remarkable points of resemblance, and perhaps of contact, with those of Israel. "It is the early religion of the Semitic world which affords the most illuminating commentary on what we are able to reconstruct from remaining records of the Mycenaean tree and pillar cult. . . . It is indeed especially from biblical sources that this form of worship receives its grandest illustration²." The term *βαιτυλο* or *βαιτυλιον*, perhaps the Hebrew בִּיתְאֵל³, was "applied in a special way to the stone which, according to the Cretan legend, was swallowed by Kronos under the belief that it was his son. But this stone, as Lenormant has well pointed out, is in fact nothing else than the material form of the Cretan Zeus himself⁴." This Cretan Zeus was a god of the *sky*, the *mountain*, and the *cave*⁵; he gave or withheld the *rain*; he was also a *bull-god*, and the altars of Cretan worship were surmounted by conven-

¹ *The Golden Bough*, 2nd ed., II, 153, 154, and 312, 313.

² Evans, *The Mycenaean Tree and Pillar Cult*, &c. (reproduced from the *Journal of Hellenic Studies*), 1901, p. 34.

³ Observe that *βαιτυ-* represents a more primitive form than the biblical בֵּית or בָּרָךְ. Cf. Gesenius-Kautzsch, *E. T.*, § 84 a, p. 239, וֵיךְ [abs.] "from *Za-it*, the *i* passing into the corresponding consonant." Note also the Sept. Βαυθῆλ.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 15.

⁵ Cf. 1 Kings xix. 9, הַמַּצֵּדָה.

tional "horns of consecration," which at other times are shown in connexion with his symbol the *labrys*, or double axe¹, or again represented at the base of the sacred pillar.

These features have their familiar parallels in the religion of Israel. But it is as a source of revealed law that the god of Crete is most interesting to biblical students. "The code of Minos became the source of all later legislation. As the wise ruler and inspired lawgiver there is something altogether biblical in his legendary character. He is the Cretan Moses, who every nine years repaired to the Cave of Zeus, whether on the Cretan Ida or on Dicta, and received from the God of the Mountain the laws for his people. Like Abraham, he is described as the 'friend of God.' Nay, in some accounts, the mythical being of Minos has a tendency to blend with that of his native Zeus²."

In *J. Q. R.*, XIII, pp. 588 et seq., Mr. Tyler has pointed out the channel by which, in the age of David, or in the period of Philistine domination which preceded it, these religious traditions may have affected Israel, viz. the known worship of *Zeus Kρηταγενής*, under the epithet of *מרינא*, at Gaza. He even fetches from this source "The Origin of the Tetragrammaton," and to confirm this hypothesis cites a coin conjecturally assigned to Gaza, and to the date *circa* 400 B. C., in which a figure, "easily identified with Zeus," is surmounted by Phœnician characters corresponding to *יהו*. I think, however, we must consider, firstly, that many, and perhaps all, the analogies which the traditions of Crete present with those of Israel may prove to consist in, or be derived from, elements common to all the ancient world; secondly, that Crete itself may owe much to Semitic influences in an early age; thirdly, that before the fourth century Gaza may have borrowed from Israel, or rather Judah, no less than Israel from Gaza, and, lastly, that it is the most improbable thing in the world that at the epoch of bitter

¹ Cp. the axe of Ramman, Maspero, *Dawn of Civilization* (4th ed.), pp. 642, 662.

² Evans, "The Palace of Minos," *Monthly Rev.*, March, 1901.

struggle crowned by successful revolt against their oppressors the Israelites should have borrowed from the latter the name of the deity to whom they ascribed their deliverance.

In *J. Q. R.*, X, 662 et seq., the present writer put forward the hypothesis that in accordance with the analogy of Hebrew tribal names, and consistently with many biblical allusions, יהוה, = "he will be," may legitimately be interpreted as the elliptic form of the invocation of the ancient Israelite warrior-god, to be completed by אל and עֲמָנִי, or אֲמָנִי, i. e. "God will be with us¹." And this suggestion has since received a double confirmation from the occurrence of the names יהוה-אל and אל-אחי, in the forms *Ia-a'-ve-ilu*, *Ia-ve-ilu*, and *Ilu-ittia*, "among the old North Semitic tribes who settled in Babylonia about 2500 B. C."² Parallel in grammatical formation and religious significance with יהוה אל are the contemporary names *Iamlil-ilu* and *Iarbi-ilu*³. There can be no sufficient reason to translate the former *Jahve is God*, but the latter names as *God sits in command*, *Great is God*⁴. "God will be" (with us) is an utterance of faith of essentially the same nature as the rest. And as among the tribal and urban names of Scripture we find, side by side with similar assurances expressed in the indicative, jussives such as יִסְפָּאֵל = "God increase" (the flock), and יִבְנֵאֵל = "God build" (the city), so here too beside the indicative, יהוה אל, we encounter the jussive יהוה אל, *Iahû-ilu*⁵, the same thought now taking shape in prayer = "God be" (with us). And, as we all know, these two forms continued to subsist throughout the biblical history long after they had by established usage exchanged the signification of predicates for that of attributes, and from "verbs" had passed into "nouns."

¹ I avail myself of the convenient summary in E. B., art. *Names*, § 113, n. 5.

² *Babel and Bible*, by Prof. Friedrich Delitzsch, Eng. trans., pp. 70, 71, 131.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 131, 137.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

It may be held that this change had begun as early as the remote period under discussion. For the Babylonian scribe has rendered יהוהאל by *Ia-ú-um-ilu*¹, as if he regarded יהי as a noun, and therefore appended the mimation². But it is to be remarked that the scribe was dealing with names which were to him foreign³, and further that a confusion of *m* and *w* is characteristic of the Babylonian dialect⁴. Probably the writer heard יהי, the *wau* retaining something of its consonantal force, as in אבני.

In the interpretation of these data the learned Assyriologist has been, I think, misled by a very natural preconception, the more persistent because almost unconscious, but alien and antagonistic to ancient religious thought. It is natural for us moderns to regard the "name" of an antique god as a "noun" by which the being so conceived may be referred to in converse or in writing. For his worshippers it was nothing of the kind. The name of a god was in the first instance the sacred epithet or formula by which he was directly addressed and effectually invoked, to which he was expected to respond, and which for that very reason was to a great extent avoided in common speech. This is the fundamental canon for the interpretation of divine names, and until its significance is fully grasped no scientific treatment of them is possible. This is the reason why in Homer a whole group of titles of gods and heroes presents the vocative form even when these terms are employed as nominatives⁵. This is why the name of the guardian deity of Rome was kept a profound secret, lest the enemies of the republic might lure him away, as the Romans were accustomed to do when they besieged a city⁶. This is why in biblical usage the

¹ *Babel and Bible*, pp. 71, 138.

² *Ibid.*, p. 135.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁴ See the *Assyrian Grammar* of the same scholar, translated by Kennedy, 1889, § 44.

⁵ Monro, *Homeric Grammar* (1891), § 96. "These are in reality vocatives which have been turned into nominatives."

⁶ Frazer, *Golden Bough* (1900), I, 446.

term אל habitually employed in proper names—since these are invocations or ascriptions—is in ordinary speech replaced by the abstract periphrasis אלהים, i. e. “divinity.” It is for this reason that the Israelite was at the same time forbidden to utter the name of the God of Israel for a vain cause¹—לשוא—i. e. apart from the purposes of religion, and to use the name of any other god at all²—since to name a god is to invoke him. The formal question at issue between Elijah and his opponents was precisely whether the national deity should be invoked in sacrifice by the name of יהוה or by that of בעל; and it is decided by the divine response³. The same principle supplies the reason why, over a wide area of folk-lore, the names of gods, of kings, and of the dead are shunned in speech, since to pronounce them is regarded not merely as irreverent, but as dangerous—it is to evoke a divinity. And in many cases even the names of ordinary living persons are kept secret or employed with great reserve, since the knowledge and use of a man’s name gives the power to call forth his soul⁴. With these facts in mind we shall be prepared to understand the dependence of the divine blessing upon the employment of the divine name in such passages as Ex. xx. 24⁵ and Num. vi. 27, and to comprehend how expressions such as יהוה אל or יהוה אל (עמו)—the former a creed and the latter a prayer—pass in time into “names” of God. That this change came about at an early period I am myself inclined to believe, for I still think it probable that the immemorial antiquity ascribed to the Name in the Judean source (Gen. iv. 26), its adoption by Moses, and the tribal name יהודה, may all be accounted for by the supposition that the last is in fact, as is suggested by Gen. xxix. 35,

¹ Exod. xx. 7, as translated by Addis.

² Exod. xxiii. 13.

³ 1 Kings xviii, esp. vv. 24, 25, 26, 32, 36–9.

⁴ See Frazer, *G. B.*², vol. I, pp. 403–47. Mr. Clodd’s little volume *Tom Tit Tot*, may also be read with pleasure and instruction.

⁵ Read הוֹכִיר = “thou shalt invoke.”

a contraction of יהוה הוּדָה¹. But the Divine Subject of such predicates, the El thus implored or praised—what God was he? Was he but one among the “gods many and lords many” of antiquity? Or was he the One above the many? Was he, as Mr. Spencer or Mr. Grant Allen would have supposed, the spirit of some ancestral chief? Or was he the Moral Supreme Being of primitive imagination described by Mr. Lang? Or, yet again, the Power, indeterminate except as spiritual, “whose pressure we feel, but whose motives are a riddle”²? We have no other answer to these questions than such as is furnished by the predicates employed. El tells us no more than Ba'al; we know neither its origin nor its meaning³. When the ejaculations by which the god is evoked in war set him vividly before us as engaged in conflict (יִשְׂרָאֵל), at hand-grips with his antagonist—[נִפְתָּלִי אֵל]—or in the act of tripping him up—[עֵקֶבֶת אֵל]—it is plain that we are concerned with a hero of legend or of myth. So, too, when we translate *Bab-ilu* by “Gate of God⁴,” we must admit that the god in question was no other than Marduk. The ancient names cited by Prof. Delitzsch do not, then, suffice to prove a monotheistic creed⁵. On the other hand, they afford a vivid illustration of what is perhaps of more real importance than the beliefs of those who bore or bestowed them—the disposition of their minds towards the object of their religion.

The religious faculty does not rest quiescent in the contemplation of an object received *ab extra*, but tends ever

¹ *J. Q. R.*, XI, 248; but יהוה rather than יה or יהו is the true subject of הוּדָה.

² Mark Pattison. In the phrase of Prof. Delitzsch “the Divine Essence . . . viewed . . . as a unity” (op. cit., pp. 70, 133).

³ It will be seen that I distrust the etymology advanced in *Babel and Bible* (pp. 69, 125). The reference to Hos. xi. 7 rests upon an error. Here, as in chap. i. 9 (read בָּלַחַם; cf. ii. 18), chap. vii. 16 (for לֹאֲעֵל read לֹבֵל), for עֵל read לֹבֵל.

⁴ Op. cit., p. 131.

⁵ “The character and value of this monotheism cannot be estimated with our present sources of knowledge.”—*Babel and Bible*, p. 133.

to mould, to glorify, and to transform into an ideal that which it has thus received. In the great temples alike of Egypt and Chaldea the tendency existed to exalt the local god to supreme rank, to ascribe to him the work of creation, and either to identify with him or subordinate to him the other members of the national pantheon¹. A striking instance of this process is supplied by the tablet in which Marduk in several aspects is identified successively with Ninib and Nêrgal or Zamama, with Bêl, Nabû, Sin, Shamash, and Addu². I am far from saying that such speculations and the emotions associated with them do not merit our respectful attention ; but they must not be cited as evidence of popular belief, or of an original monotheism.

If only (one is tempted to exclaim) it had been possible, while there was yet time, for the Egyptian and Chaldean priests and scribes, the thinkers and the writers of those lands, to exchange their cumbrous scripts for the alphabet of Phœnicia, and to lay aside what was merely particular and local, with the survivals of savagery, in their religion ! This they could not do. Their creed was a synthesis of traditions. Like that of the Roman Church, it grew by accretion. They could not reject. Their conservatism enabled them to preserve and to transmit through periods of time unparalleled in the history of mankind the records of history, the documents of literature, the traditions of religion. And then, when this transmission could no more take place, the whole system, incapable of adaptation, ceased to be, and history, literature, and religion were alike buried in oblivion³.

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¹ See Maspero, *Dawn of Civilization*, 4th ed., pp. 135-52.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 75, 143.

³ Further articles on the subject of the "Origins of the Religion of Israel" will follow.